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Animals and Human Language

Introduction

There are a lot of stories about creatures that can talk. We usually assume that they are fantasy or fiction or that they involve birds or animals simply imitating something they have heard humans say.

Does human language have properties that make it so unique that it is quite unlike any other communication system and hence unlearnable by any other creature?

1- Reflexivity

- Reflexivity is the property that enables humans to use language to think and talk about language itself and does not appear to be present in any other creature's communication system. I went to the bank.

2- Displacement

- It allows language users to talk about things and events not present in the immediate environment. It allows us to talk about things and places (e.g. angels, fairies, Santa Claus, Superman, heaven, hell) whose existence we cannot even be sure of.
- Is it true that bee communication may have the property of displacement? Example: the tail-wagging dance. What is the limitation of such a kind of communication?

3- Arbitrariness

- There is no 'natural' connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. For example, there is no actual relation between the word 'bread' and its meaning.
- In the majority of animal signals, there does appear to be a clear connection between the conveyed message and the signal used to convey it. This impression we have of the non-

arbitrariness of animal signaling may be closely connected to the fact that, for any animal, the set of signals used in communication is finite.

4- Productivity

- Humans are continually creating new expressions and novel utterances by manipulating their linguistic resources to describe new objects and situations.
- Productivity = creativity = open-endedness.
- Cicadas /sɪ'kɑ:də/ have four signals to choose from.

5- Cultural Transmission

- The process whereby a language is passed on from one generation to the next is described as cultural transmission. We acquire language in a culture with other speakers.
- Human is born with some kind of predisposition to acquire a language but (a culture) is needed to activate this ability.

6- Duality

- Language is organized at two levels: or layers:
 - a\ Physical level: It is the ability to produce individual sounds. / b, d, a/.
 - b\ Meaning level: It refers to the ability to combine the individual sounds into meaningful unit. Bad-dad-ad-abd.-etc.

Talking to animals

Human Language has some properties that make it different from animal communication system. Animals cannot understand human language, so it is less likely they can produce human language. Gua, a chimp's baby is raised with a human baby. He could understand 100 words but did not say any of them.

Viki is another chimps raised by a scientist couple. He has been trained for 5 years by trying to shape his mouth to produce sounds. Viki managed to produce some poorly articulated words.